



KEEPING HISTORY CURRENT

Subject: **Scenes of the Peace**



- Living Close with nature – 5th Avenue Beaverlodge, August 29th, 2020
- submitted by – Janet L. Peterson

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Upcoming Events

NEXT EVENT being developed is the history of the Air Cadets in the area. this presentation will have to be virtual rather than a gathered audience and we will email everyone when it is ready. An event not to be missed.

Hoping to send out next Special Issue Newsletter in November in honor of Remembrance Day.

Next Scheduled newsletter Volume 10 issue 4 – December – lets celebrate Peace Country Christmas traditions.

President's Message

Hello;

I hope you are all keeping well, and getting ready for winter in the Peace Country. The leaves are almost gone, except for most of my neighbor's, which landed in my yard and need raking. But I did enjoy their shade all summer, so fair is fair, I guess.

Thanks to those who braved the weather to attend our last presentation in Sexsmith. By all accounts, the day was a success. David Leonard gave a great presentation. He then guided members through time and space, showing how Sexsmith grew over the years. The notes he provided allowed participants to keep track of things. There are many, many interesting buildings and history to see in Sexsmith.

Thanks also to the Sexsmith & District Museum Society who provided the venue and the lunch for our members. They did a bang-up job.

The next event is still being developed. As mentioned in the last Newsletter, the topic will be the history of the Air Cadets in the area. It is looking more certain that we will have to make the presentation virtually rather than a gathered audience.

In this edition of the Newsletter, you will find a description of the Sexsmith event and David Leonard's presentation.

Thanks to Wanda Zenner for continuing her tradition of finding interesting local history to present. Her article on Dorothy Bezanson, Ansel Maynard Bezanson's first wife fills in a missing piece of history in the Bezanson's story.

At the end of the Newsletter is a section that discusses reasons for being a member of the PCHS. A good case is made, and I suggest this could be used to show neighbors and friends why they might consider joining.

Finally, our Provincial organization, the Historical Society of Alberta of which we are all members, is in a state of rebuilding itself. Earlier this year, the Province cut grants to the HSA quite severely. An office move to a smaller space was required, and a staff member was retired. Volunteers were then faced with figuring out how to keep the organization operational. Currently, things are looking much better than they did.

A Council, which consists of an Executive, Directors, and the Presidents of the five Chapters that exist in Alberta, guides the HSA. The PCHS therefore has a say in the management of the HSA. I encourage you look at the HSA website to see some of the work that is done at the Provincial level. The website also shows the links to the other four Chapters.

As always, Enjoy. Pat Wearmouth President, PCHS

Peace Country Historical Society

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[Facebook.com/peacecountryhistoricalsociety/](https://www.facebook.com/peacecountryhistoricalsociety/)
www.pc-hs.ca

Vision: To encourage the appreciation of the history of the Peace Country.

Mandate: The mandated area of the Peace Country Historical Society is the Alberta portion of the Peace River Country.

Board of Directors

Pat Wearmouth – President
Charles Taws - Vice- President
Wanda Zenner – Treasurer
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David Leonard – Director
David Rhody – Director
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Fran Moore – Heritage Plaque program
Susan Thomson – Heritage Fair, Educational Kits
David Leonard – Advocacy & Land Settlement
Janet L. Peterson – Newsletter, membership
Charles Taws – Web presence

Contact Us

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jlscreations@telus.net

Contributions to Newsletter – *this is your newsletter*

Specifics for contributions to next newsletters –

Special edition has 2 pages left to fill – Remembrance Day and or service to community stories – deadline November 3, 2020.

December Newsletter is looking for winter and or Christmas articles – Deadline December 5, 2020.

Contributions to this newsletter are gratefully accepted. If you have a family story you want to tell, a memory you think would inspire others, or a snippet from the history of the Peace Country you want to share, please contact Janet at the email above, must be in word for me to be able to use it. We do reserve the right to accept and edit (with your approval) all contributions. **Thank You**

Peace Country Historical Society hosted another successful event

invites its members to:

A Walking Tour of historic Sexsmith,

Grain Capital of the British Empire

Tour courtesy of the Sexsmith Museum Society

Saturday, September 12, meeting at 10:00 am at the NAR Train Station

Please dress for the occasion, remember to distance at 6',

and **BRING A MASK** (and wear it)

Lunch will be served



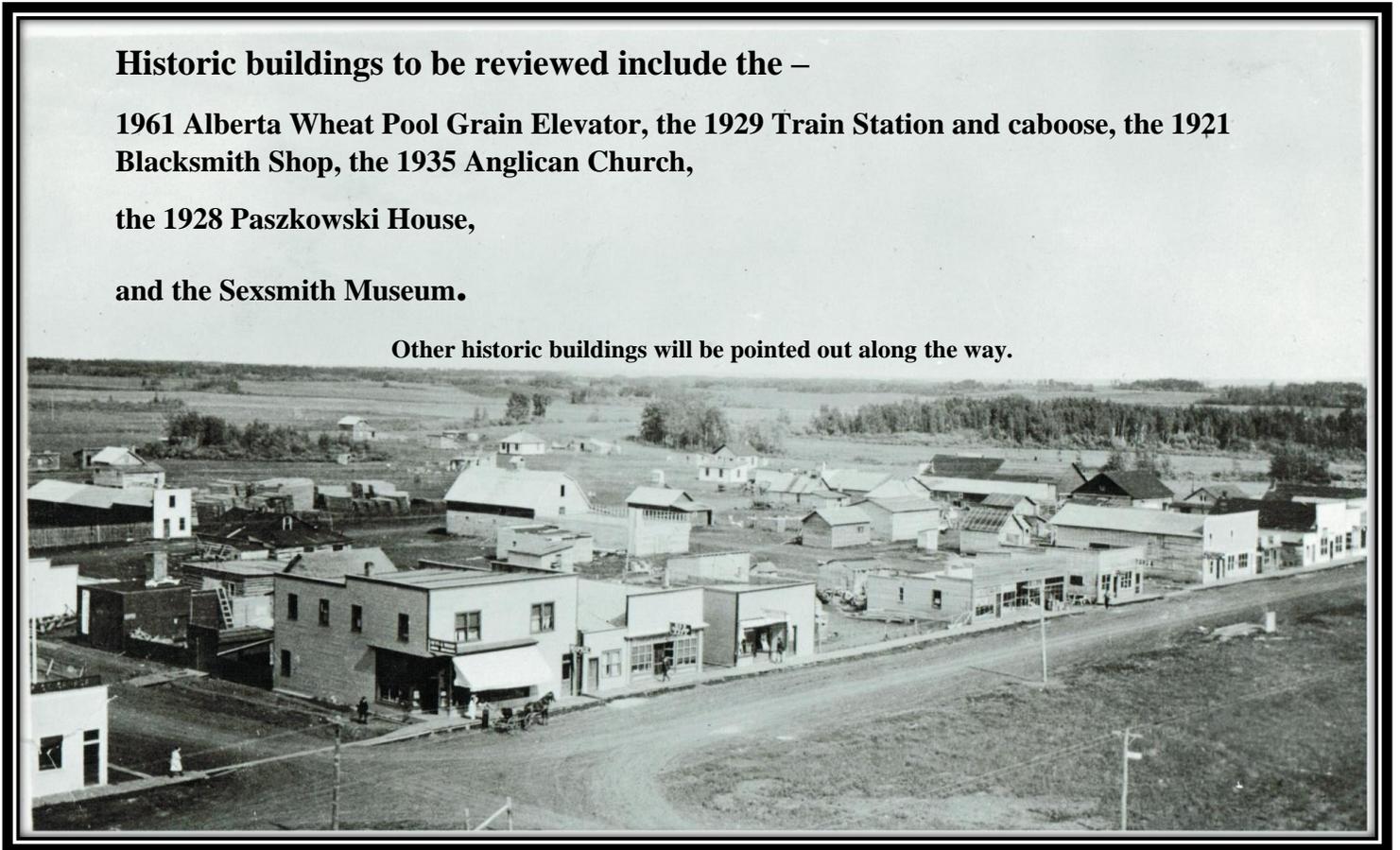
Historic buildings to be reviewed include the –

1961 Alberta Wheat Pool Grain Elevator, the 1929 Train Station and caboose, the 1921 Blacksmith Shop, the 1935 Anglican Church,

the 1928 Paszkowski House,

and the Sexsmith Museum.

Other historic buildings will be pointed out along the way.



Sexsmith in 1923. Photo courtesy of the Glenbow Archives, Calgary NA1644-131



A cold windy Saturday morning saw 24 interested people show up for PCHS September 12, 2020 Walking tour and lecture by Dr David Leonard. This was a joint program presented by the Sexsmith and District Museum Society and the Peace Country Historical Society. Flo Blais welcomed everybody and the PCHS president Pat Wearmouth spoke on his experiences being brakeman on the line 50 years ago, while never seeing Sexsmith during the light of day. Then introducing Dr. David Leonard, the event officially began. Dr. Leonard spoke of the beginnings and growth of Sexsmith and the forms of settlement and development through the years, including the little disagreement in Europe in 1914 the disrupted the region for a few years before another burst of growth.

Dr. Leonard provided each participant with a package for the event for our review and further understanding. *I think he may spring a quiz on us all when we least expect it so read your material people.* After the lecture the walking tour began



Being mobility challenged myself I handed my camera to Pat Wearmouth to take additional photos of the event, while I went on to Anderson Hall.

After the tour and talks about each building on the tour a wonderful lunch was served while we all visited and discussed items of interest and what everyone had learned.

At all time social distancing was observed and masks were worn by just about everyone. It's amazing how resilient and resourceful those in the Peace Country are.

Just think how people would have reacted a few years ago if a group of people wearing masks had walked into a store.

Following the next few pictures of the event is the complete lecture presented by Dr. David Leonard for this event.



Sexsmith, Grain Capital of the British Empire

A History to 1960

By David W. Leonard

The community of Sexsmith began in 1912 when Kate Johnston opened a stopping place at a spot where the trail between Grande Prairie and Spirit River intersected the Emerson Trail. At the time, the district was rapidly filling up with homesteaders. The stopping place was actually the homestead house of Mrs. Johnston and her husband, Bob, located at NE7 TP7 R5 W6.¹ This is about three miles south-southeast of present day Sexsmith. On 29 July 1913, the Grande Prairie *Herald* reported that a church service by Reverend Alexander Forbes had just been held at Johnston's stopping place.



In 1913, the stopping place began to serve as the post office for the district, and was named Sexsmith, with Kate Johnston as the post master. The name Sexsmith was chosen, probably by Kate herself, in honor of David Sexsmith, a neighbor and former Klondiker who had travelled through the area as early as 1898, and later operated a stopping place at Beaver Dam, several miles to the north. In 1911, he and his wife, Cliffe, filed for eight quarters of land in the area with South African scrip, making them one of the bigger land holders in the Peace River Country.ⁱⁱ

Sexsmith in 1923. Photo courtesy of the Glenbow Archives, Calgary NA1644-131

In early 1916, the Edmonton, Dunvegan & British Columbia Railway was extended through the district on its way to Grande Prairie. The Railway acquired property from another large land holder named Benhard Foster on SW25 TP73 R5 W6 and proceeded to put up a siding and subdivide a townsite. The townsite was named Benville by the E,D&BC after Mr. Foster. Shortly thereafter, the government relocated the post office at the Sexsmith stopping place to Leonard Howard's hardware store in the Benville townsite. The evolving hamlet was then re-named Sexsmith as all mail would be directed to this address.

During the immediate post World War I era, Sexsmith developed into a community of considerable importance, for the region to the east around North Kleskun, Teepee Creek and Bad Heart was then being opened up for farming, some of it by returning war veterans. To the north and west, farmers from as far away as Webster, Buffalo Lakes and La Glace also brought their grain and other farm produce into Sexsmith for export.

Like the rest of the Peace River Country, the Sexsmith district experienced a recession during the early 1920's due to falling grain prices, a result of post war overproduction. However, with improved international trade, prices rose in the mid-1920s, and the Peace River Country began to experience another massive settlement wave. Although Sexsmith itself did not increase greatly in population, its importance to its agricultural hinterland was significantly augmented, and, in 1929, the hamlet was incorporated as a village with about 250 people. Two years later, according to the Canadian census, its population stood at 304. The village now included parts of nine blocks, bordered to the west by the railway tracks and to the east by a small creek.

The avenues of the village were angled parallel to the railway tracks which ran north-northwest and south-southeast. Most commercial enterprises were strung out along Railroad Avenue, commonly known as Main Street, with many of the buildings sporting false fronts to make them appear larger than they were. The buildings ran in a single row on the east side of the street facing the tracks, many of them painted creamy yellow, with several of the larger structures having rolled-up awnings which were spread out on most summer afternoons.

Across from Main Street were the buildings of the Northern Alberta Railway, until 1929 the old Edmonton, Dunvegan & British Columbia Railway. These buildings were painted the standard railway maroon. The NAR station itself served as the communications center for the village. The agent, Bill Turner, lived in the station with his family and monitored the movement of the trains. He also managed the Canadian National freighting service and operated the CN Telegraph. The trains provided the only expeditious outlet to the outside world.

When it was incorporated, Sexsmith provided the following services to its local and district residents: a post office, a bank, a school (in two buildings), a fire hall, two hotels (one with tavern), a rooming house, two restaurants, a grocery store, two general stores, two hardware stores, two meat markets, a bakery, a drugstore, a jewelry store, a dry goods store, an auctioneer & furniture dealership, a harness shop, two lumber yards, two blacksmith shops, one tinsmith, four implement dealerships, two livery & feed stables, two bulk gas

and oil dealerships, three real estate and insurance agents, a doctor, a lawyer, an Alberta Provincial Police officer, a tailor, a barber, a beauty salon, a pool hall, a community hall (also serving as a theatre), two social clubs, and three churches.ⁱⁱⁱ

Along the streets and alleys of the village, recently erected poles carried the lines of Canadian Utilities and Alberta Government Telephones. Some of the poles were just then being fixed with street lights, and several also served as bulletin boards. On the pole next to the Village-owned livery barn, an electric alarm was about to replace the old acoustic fire bell. The barn itself held the Village water well and horse-drawn fire wagon. As there was no hospital, most patients requiring institutional care went to Grande Prairie. Sexsmith did however have a maternity home run by Johanna Haakstad in her dwelling next to the Catholic Church. When she retired 30 years later, her register would list over 3,100 children she had brought into the world.^{iv}

Most important to the district farmers however, on the west side of the railway tracks, seven large grain elevators dominated the skyline. This was more than any other community in northern Alberta. These too were painted railway maroon, except for the new United Grain Growers structure which was white. The largest grain company was the newly formed Alberta Wheat Pool, a collective to which many district farmers belonged. The elevators were accompanied by the two livestock dealerships, a stockyard, and the two bulk gas and oil dealerships. Further west was the Village nuisance ground. Just east of the village, across a small creek, was the sports ground.

As in all northern farming districts, the farmers around Sexsmith were especially vulnerable to the vagaries of the weather. There were four distinct seasons, with winter usually lasting five to six months. Because of the greater extent of sunshine in summer, crops matured faster than on the southern prairies, but taking them off one day late could spell disaster, for early frosts were common. The late 1920s were nonetheless a bountiful time. In 1929, Sexsmith was the largest rural shipping point in northern Alberta for both grain and livestock, as 1,180,000 bushels of grain and \$229,000 worth of livestock were exported that year.^v

With the Depression of the 1930s, Sexsmith suffered like most prairie communities, although people from the district did not support the radical Social Credit movement in 1935. Crop yields remained high but the returns were meagre because of falling grain prices, reaching as low as 32¢ per bushel for #1 Northern wheat in 1934. Freight rates were also higher than on the southern prairies due to the greater distance Peace Country farmers had to ship their produce. As a result, some farmers declined to export their grain, and chose to utilize local private grist mills to manufacture their own flour. One of these was run by Lee Warren on the southern outskirts of Sexsmith.

Despite the drawbacks, Sexsmith continued to export large quantities of grain, mainly wheat, even though farm foreclosures and homestead cancellations continued. Many families then made their way to large cities like Edmonton, although employment opportunities there were few. Most who stayed took other employment if it was available, often as laborers for other district farmers.

Sexsmith also remained a lively social community. Reports in the *Grande Prairie Herald* disclose that dances and other socials took place regularly, along with bake sales, bazaars and clothing drives, usually to help the needy. The Sexsmith Women's Institute was particularly active, as were the Catholic, Anglican, Lutheran, and United Churches. In 1935, Walter McNaughton established the Peace River Bible Institute on the southeast outskirts of town and, before long, it became the largest religious institution in the district, evolving into a Christian college.

In September 1939, the western prairies of Canada were jolted out of the Depression by the announcement that Canada was at war with Germany. Instantly, young unemployed men were offered a new vocation, military service. On 13 September, a recruiting drive was begun in Grande Prairie, and more than a few of the first recruits were from the Sexsmith district. Regional farms also began to prosper. As with World War I, farmers of Britain and on the Continent were soon engaged in battle or the war industry, and so the farms of North America and throughout the British Empire were invigorated to produce more.

In no community in Canada was the export of grain more prolific than in Sexsmith. As was pointed out in an article by R.A. Macleod in the *Grande Prairie Herald* on 9 December 1948, the claim of the Village to be “The Grain Capital of the British Empire” was:

... not based on the handling of a single season, but on the 10 year average c.1938-47 inclusive. One failure [was in] 1938 when we handled less than 200,000 bushels. Over the next 10 years Sexsmith elevators had an average annual handling of more than 1,600,000 bus. In 3 of the 10 years, 1939-40, 40-41, & 43-44, our handling exceeded over two million bu. In 40-41 it was 2,600,000. It will be noted that our average in 10 years exceeds the record claimed by the Towns which recently published their figures, Sexsmith District Board of Trade challenge any primary shipping point in Canada, that is to say the world, to show a better average.

Large grain exports continued into the 1950s. In 1955, the Village saw its ninth elevator grace the skyline, the most of any community in the province. The economy was also buoyed by extensive gas and oil exploration in the area.

Social life also remained lively in the early 1950s, although dampened somewhat by the polio epidemic of the time. The community even had a newspaper, the *Sexsmith Sentinel*, run by Art Menzies. The middle of the decade saw two modern schools go up on the east side of town, one of them Separate. Most students were rural, bussed in, eventually, from as far away as Bad Heart and Bear Lake.

Most district farmers continued to prosper, but others were finding the costs of continually upgrading equipment too much to bear and sold out to more prosperous neighbors. By 1960, the average farm in the area was over 600 acres. Fluctuating grain prices and constant delays in moving grain from the elevators to the Lakehead or Vancouver were other perpetual problems. Local merchants also felt the pinch of unpaid bills, and, during the late 1950's, their troubles grew worse as improved communications meant that shopping in Grande Prairie was becoming easier and more efficient. This was especially true when



Highway #2 between the two communities was completely paved in 1958, and an IGA Foodliner supermarket built at the north side of the new city the following year. Several local stores were closed because of this.

Giving expression to the woes of Sexsmith were the destruction by fire of three grain elevators as well as the new curling rink during 1959-62. The community managed to survive however, unlike other centers such as Dimsdale, Huallen and Clairmont, but, when growth returned in the early 1970's, it was due mainly to the village's increasing role as a bedroom community of Grande Prairie.

But growth did occur, and, in 1979, Sexsmith was incorporated as a town with over 1,000 people. By this time, the Northern Alberta Rape Seed Plant just south of town was a major economic concern. Also, like Wembley, Beaverlodge and Hythe, Sexsmith was of sufficient distance from Grande Prairie to maintain its own identity. The growth was also in community spirit, as a new sense of historical achievement began to set in with the

designation of the blacksmith shop a provincial historic resource in 1983, and other buildings soon after. Today, the Sexsmith Museum Society is one of the more active historical societies in northern Alberta, dedicated to preserving structural elements of the former village and its proud soubriquet as Grain Capital of the British Empire.



Endnotes

¹ See the land files on the Johnstons in Provincial Archives of Alberta, accession 74.32, files 1762953 and 1801655.

² See the land files on David and Cliffe Sexsmith in *ibid.*, files 1698752 and 1729157. Other large Land holders in the Sexsmith district at this time included Benhard and Hannah Foster, Oscar and Magna Foster, and Kate and Robert Johnston, who all took land with South African scrip.

³ This information was taken from Hendersons *Alberta Directory* for 1928-29.

⁴ See Johanna Haakstad's registers in South Peace Regional Archives, RG 0655.

⁵ These figures were reported in the *Grande Prairie Herald* for 12 September, 1930.

Monuments, memorials, cairns

Mission Cemetery

Submitted by Wanda Zenner

This cemetery was originally the property of La Corporation Episcopal Catholique Romaine de Grouard, located along the banks of Bear Creek. In 1964, it was recognized that sections of private property and roadway along Bear Creek were eroding and this cemetery was at risk.

The City of Grande Prairie approved the transfer of the Mission Cemetery to a section of the Grande Prairie Cemetery, which was completed by September 26, 1966. The City extended every effort to determine the identity of all those interred in the Mission Cemetery; however, only 61 of the 123 individuals buried there have been identified. On July 28, 1996, a monument was erected to commemorate those identified and unidentified persons formerly interred in the Mission Cemetery.



The following article regarding the Mission Cemetery appeared in the June 19, 2013 Edition of the Grande Prairie Daily Herald-Tribune

Resting place marked 105 years later

Peace Country's early pioneer, Dorothy Bezanson, is recognized thanks to work of local history buff

More than a century after her death one of the Peace Country's early pioneers has had their name recognized in a local cemetery. Dorothy Bezanson, wife of Bezanson founder, Ancel Maynard Bezanson, has finally had her grave marked with the help of a local historian.

Wanda Zenner of Bezanson was participating in the South Peace Regional Archives cemetery tour when she realized that something didn't add up.

Dorothy's name was nowhere to be found.

Dorothy, a nurse, married Ancel on Feb. 18, 1908 in Edmonton before heading north to the Peace Country. After a five-week caboose ride the couple arrived at Big Smoky on April 7, 1908. Not long after Dorothy became pregnant.

As Dorothy's pregnancy continued she started to become ill. The baby boy, Francis, was born on Christmas Day, 1908. He was reported as the first non-aboriginal boy born in the area.

Three days later Dorothy died.

She was buried at the Mission Cemetery originally located along the banks of Bear Creek.

In 1964, it was realized that sections of private property and roadway along Bear Creek were eroding and the cemetery was at risk.

The City of Grande Prairie responded by approving the transfer of the Mission Cemetery to the Grande Prairie Cemetery in 1966.

In the move, only 61 of the 124 individuals buried at the Mission Cemetery were identified. On July 28, 1966 a monument was created to commemorate those identified and unidentified.

During the cemetery tour, Zenner noticed that Dorothy's name wasn't on the monument.

"I just thought oh my goodness, this poor lady doesn't have her name recorded at all," Zenner said.

Zenner found as much information as she could about Dorothy and was successful in having her name added to the monument 105 years after she died.

It was a lot of research to pool together, but it was worth it, Zenner said.

"I think everybody should have a headstone or marker or something to show that their life meant something while they were here. It just happened that (Dorothy) was somebody from my area and I thought oh my goodness, I will find out if I can do this for her," Zenner said.

The SPRA has been conducting cemetery tours since 2010.

"It's nice to see people taking an interest in the area and if we can spark that, that's one of our purposes of being around," said Leslie Pearson of SPRA.

Aaron Hinks Herald-Tribune Staff

Mission Monument showing the addition of Dorothy Bezanson's name.

Dorothy Robillard Bezanson

Photo taken after graduating as a nurse from the New York City Hospital



Simard, Frederick	August 21, 1920
Smith, Garry	June 26, 1920
Smith, James Thomas	June 24, 1920
Souriel, Edward	November 4, 1918
Tesar, Joe	November 15, 1918
Tesar, Mary Blanche	November 10, 1918
Trepanier, Joseph	March 26, 1918
Whalen, Thomas G.	January 1, 1918
Wuwand, John	June 18, 1918
Zimmer, Charles	June 18, 1918
Bezanson, Dorothy	1908



Keeping History Current

A few thoughts on why to join PCHS

Just a bit of interesting PCHS history for anyone:

- 2008 A Heritage Symposium held at GPRC and the idea of forming a new chapter of the Historical Society of Alberta was conceived.
- At a meeting held in December the idea was approved and, under the guidance of Campbell Ross, a steering committee was formed to draw up Goals, a Mission statement, & Bylaws.
- 2009 The Peace Country Historical Society, following a membership drive and consultation with the proper authorities on bylaws, became a legally recognized society and an official branch of the Historical Society of Alberta.

Chapters provide regular newsletters, informing of programs, meetings, upcoming events, regional history stories, reviewing past events, and sharing local heritage issues.

Chapters are also mandated to publish or sponsor publications relating to the local or provincial history.

Members are invited to serve on boards and committees. The more members the wider the variety of projects able to be undertaken at the local and regional level.

Membership Privileges-

As a member of the Peace Country Historical Society (the newest and fifth chapter of the Historical Society of Alberta – covering the Peace country of Alberta) you will be a part of the diverse and vibrant community sharing knowledge and information about heritage with each other and the public. As well as having a dual membership with the Historical Society of Alberta (incorporated 1907). Dual membership includes

- Individual (\$15.00) and family (\$25.00) membership – quarterly newsletter History Now
- Combined – membership and Alberta History subscription (\$35.00) – includes both newsletters
- An Affiliate Membership (\$55.00) for museums, schools, and libraries – has both newsletters an invaluable history resource for students and teachers.

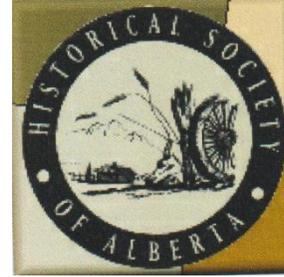
Membership allows members to receive discount rates on society tours, special events, provincial publications, etc.

Attend chapter program events, presentations, tours, workshops, book launches, socials, banquets, celebrations, AGM's and conferences.

A MEMBERSHIP IN THE PEACE COUNTRY HISTORICAL SOCIETY WILL GIVE THE PEACE COUNTRY OF ALBERTA A VOICE IN THE PROVINCIAL ORGANIZATION.



Membership Information



This membership is ___ new ___ a renewal

Name _____

Address _____

Postal Code _____

Phone _____ Cell _____

Email _____

Publication preference (Newsletters and Alberta History) Postal _____, email _____

Individual Membership: \$15.00 \$ _____

Alberta History Subscription only: \$25.00 \$ _____

Membership and *Alberta History* Subscription: \$35 \$ _____

Family Membership: \$25 \$ _____

Alberta History Subscription only: \$25.00 \$ _____

Affiliate Membership (school/ museum/library) \$55 \$ _____

Affiliate Membership (corporation/foundation) and subscription \$120.00 \$ _____

I wish to donate to the: PCHS Projects \$ _____

HSA Endowment Fund \$ _____

TOTAL \$ _____

Please make cheques payable to:

The Historical Society of Alberta
and mail to

P.O. Box 4035 Station "C"
Calgary, Alberta T2T 5M9
